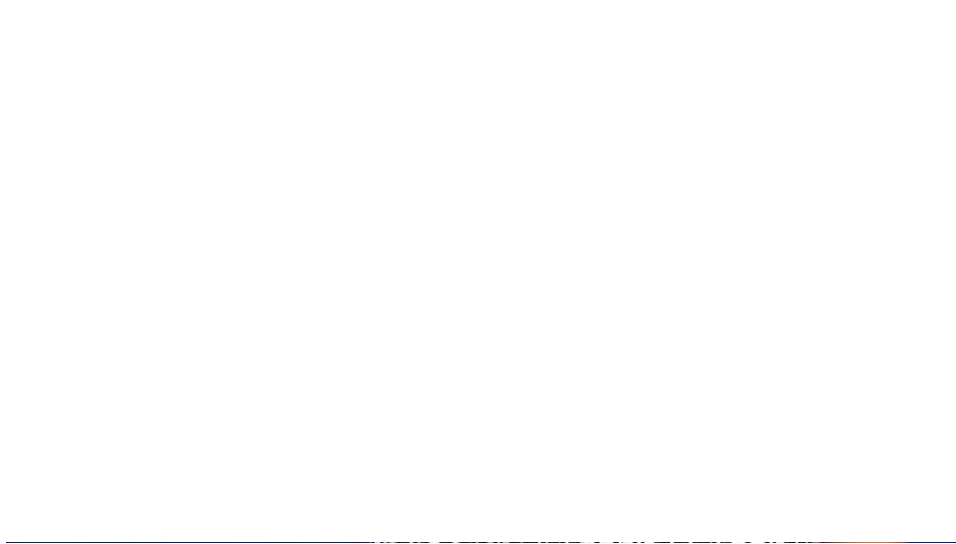

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VANCOUVER | News

Vaccine card opponents stage another protest outside Vancouver city hall





01:48 ▶

Anti-vaccine protesters gather outside Vancouver's city hall



'No one is happy' about minister



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VANCOUVER - Opponents of B.C.'s vaccine card system staged another protest outside Vancouver city hall on Monday, hours after the proof-of-vaccination requirement came into effect.

Hundreds of people gathered outside the building in the early afternoon, some carrying signs reading "No Medical Apartheid" and "My Body, My Choice" to protest the provincial health officer order barring unvaccinated individuals from non-essential activities such as dining in at restaurants and going to the movies.

They also took part in chants of "Freedom!"

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The protest was a fraction of the size of an initial demonstration against the vaccine card system that saw thousands crowd around Vancouver General Hospital earlier this month, but had a similar number of attendees to another held last Wednesday.

Organizers of the so-called "National Health Freedom Movement," which is behind several simultaneous protests planned across the country on Monday, described the event as a silent vigil to honour those affected by measures put in place to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Participants were encouraged to bring flowers, pictures, cards and letters, and to share stories of loss.

Earlier in the day, Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau announced that his party, if re-elected, would make it a crime to block access to buildings that provide health-care services or to intimidate the employees who work in those settings.

"To know that a nurse, going into a late shift, crossing a parking lot, might be afraid that there's going to be someone there to spit on her or shout obscenities at her – that's not OK," Trudeau said during a campaign stop in Vancouver.

Monday's protest was supposed to take place outside of Vancouver General again, but the group made a last-minute decision to move in the face of public criticism.

The protestors have claimed to support health-care workers who don't want to be vaccinated, but the overwhelming reaction from those within the sector has been scathing.

Following the first demonstration, a worker at Kelowna General Hospital went as far as to describe a protest in her city as a "disgusting, misguided display of disrespect and ignorance."

Christina Gower, a psychiatric nurse in Vancouver, told CTV News watching the Sept. 1 demonstration felt like a "slap in the face," and said morale was already an issue with workers stretched thin dealing with the influx of patients during the fourth wave.

Health Minister Adrian Dix called the protests one of the most frustrating challenges facing officials at this stage in the pandemic.

"Talking to health-care workers who are dealing with the reality of this situation in our public hospitals in and around the province, it is a time of very, very high risk for COVID-19

for anyone who's unvaccinated. We see this in the numbers. They are staggering," Dix said in an interview with CTV Morning Live on Monday.

"And it's not like people who are demonstrating are also saying, 'Well, we're concerned about vaccination but we're taking care to be masked and so on.' Their approach is not, I think, the right approach."

Still, Dix said his approach and that of other health officials is to "continue to be positive," and called the new B.C. vaccine card a part of that strategy. He said the system allows the vast majority of people to continue doing things they couldn't earlier in the pandemic, such as dining in restaurants, while those who refuse vaccination will simply have to wait.

Prior to the start of Monday's demonstration, the Vancouver Police Department said it supports the public's right to protest – but that officers will also balance that right with the need to maintain public safety and prevent the blocking of "critical infrastructure," including hospitals.

"While we support people's right to assemble and express themselves, this doesn't give anybody permission to harass or endanger others, it doesn't give anybody permission to block emergency vehicles or to block people's ability to move around the city," Sgt. Steve Addison said.

"Anybody who breaks the law or endangers these public could be arrested."

With files from CTV News Vancouver's Travis Prasad and Penny Daflos

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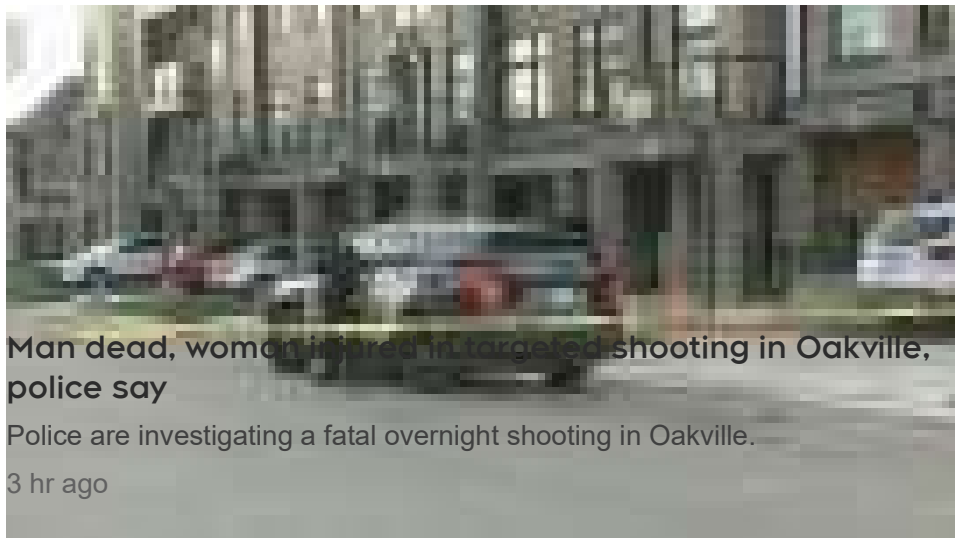
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